HEALTHY LIVING

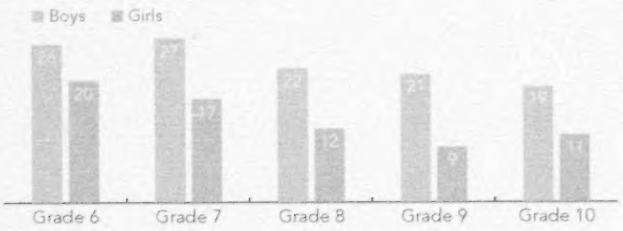
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, SEDENTARY ACTIVITY, AND HEALTHY EATING REMAIN KEY PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN CANADA

The health of young people is influenced by a number of common behaviours. With respect to healthy living, three of the most important factors that determine whether a young person is healthy or not are the amounts of physical activity that they participate in, the amounts of time engaged in sedentary activities, and healthy eating behaviours. Healthy lifestyles during the teenage years inevitably lead to better states of health during adulthood. But if left unchecked, unhealthy lifestyles during adolescence can become major risk factors for chronic health problems.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Canada's physical activity guidelines* indicate that young people should be engaged in physical activity at "moderate to vigorous levels" for at least 60 minutes per day, seven days per week.

YOUTH ENGAGED IN 60 OR MORE MINUTES OF DAILY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (%)



This fact sheet was developed from the *Canadian Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC)* survey. The HBSC survey has been conducted on six occasions in Canada (since 1989) by the Social Program Evaluation Group at Queen's University. It profiles the health of young Canadians aged 11–15 years. The 2010 Canadian national report focused on mental health. HBSC in Canada is also part of a larger international study conducted in affiliation with the World Health Organization, with similar 2010 surveys administered in 39 mainly European and North American countries. The Canadian study is supported by funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada.

See: Janssen, I., Héroux, M., & Carson, V. (2011). Healthy Living. In J. Freeman et al. (Ed.), *The health of Canada's young people: a mental health focus* (pp. 119–133). Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada.

For more information about the HBSC study and for Canada-specific data, please visit: www.publichealth.gc.ca

For international data, visit the HBSC global site at: www.hbsc.org

* Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology

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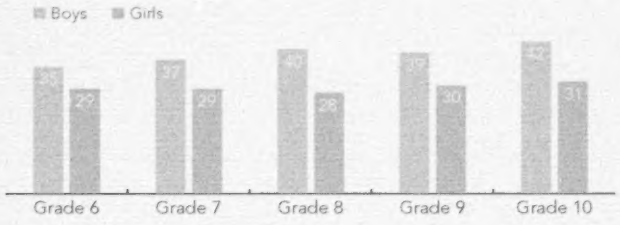
Canada

In 2010, less than one-quarter of boys and even fewer girls met these guidelines. These figures are consistent with findings reported in previous national studies, including the 2002 and 2006 HBSC surveys. Girls continue to report less physical activity than boys at all grade levels and levels of physical activity decline as children grow older.

SETTINGS FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Young people can engage in physical activity in a variety of settings. While large amounts of activity occur in organized and unstructured school activities, some physical activity is accumulated outside of school hours. Boys in all grades engage in more physical activity than girls outside of school hours.

FOUR OR MORE HOURS/WEEK OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (%)



HEALTHY EATING

The report documents encouraging findings about some dietary factors. For example, the consumption of sweets (candy) and sugared soft drinks by young people declined in 2010 relative to 2002 and 2006 levels.

Non-nutritious diets that include high amounts of sugar coincide with many other negative health outcomes. For example, both boys and girls who report more frequent soft drink consumption also report higher levels of behavioural problems.

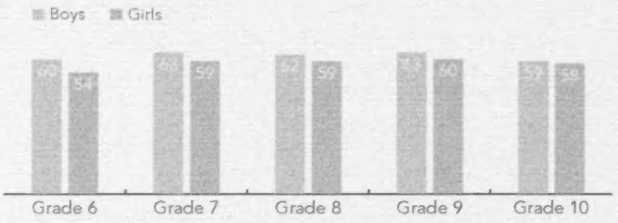
Other relationships between diet and mental health

There were also suggestions that other dietary factors relate to indicators of mental health. For example, high levels of behavioural problems were correlated with more frequent consumption of fast foods. In contrast, boys and girls who reported diets rich in vegetable content were more likely to experience higher levels of emotional well-being.

SEDENTARY ACTIVITIES

Young people are surrounded by opportunities to engage in various forms of "screen time", whether this involves television, computers, gaming or other mobile devices. There is recent evidence to suggest that such sedentary behaviours can have negative health effects.

YOUTH REPORTING TWO OR MORE HOURS OF TELEVISION VIEWING PER DAY (%)



In addition to large amounts of television, about one-half of boys and one-quarter of girls report two or more hours per day playing video games. While these sedentary behaviours can have obvious effects on the physical health of children, they are also highly correlated to negative mental health outcomes. For example, young people who engage in more screen time are also more likely to report more behavioural problems. This pattern was seen for multiple different types of screen time and a variety of different mental health outcomes.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

One of the simplest ways that young people can increase physical activity and build it into their daily routines is to travel to school using an "active" form of transportation, such as walking, running, or biking. Those that do are more active physically, and also report more positive mental health outcomes including "prosocial behaviours".

It is unfortunate, therefore, that the majority of young people reported that they used motorized forms of transportation as their primary means of getting to school. Active transportation was most commonly reported by grade 6 boys (43%) and girls (38%), and declined steadily as young people entered their high school years.

In collaboration with JCSH Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health

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